

We arrived in Yiyang District City at about three o'clock one afternoon. There was nothing out of the ordinary to distinguish Yiyang from any other city of its size. There were many shops and crowds of people on the streets but that was not unusual. Suddenly, however, I did see something that was very interesting to me. "Jun-chih, look!" I exclaimed. "Have you noticed the District Magistrate's proclamations pasted on the walls?"

"Yes, I've seen them," replied Mao. "But I didn't bother to read them. Why are you so excited? Why do you ask?"

"Here's another one," I said, stopping. "Just look at it carefully."

Mao looked and turned to me, "All cities have proclamations like this pasted on their walls," he said. "I see nothing unusual about this one."

"But look at the Magistrate's signature," I suggested. "Who is he?"

"The words are very clearly written," replied Mao. "His name is Chang Kang-feng."

"But don't you know who Chang Kang-feng is?" I asked.

"No, I don't," Mao answered. "Am I supposed to know him? Who is he?"

"Why he's the head chemistry professor at First Normal School," I explained.

"Oh, he taught only the higher classes, so I don't know him," said Mao. "Our chemistry teacher was Mr. Wang. Are you sure this Chang Kang-feng is the same person? There must be many people with that same name."

"Yes, I'm sure this is he. He comes from Yiyang City. Not only do I remember his strong Yiyang accent, but he left school two months before summer vacation. Mr. Liu took over his classes. Now I realize that he came back here to be District Magistrate."

"Are you and he good friends?" Mao wanted to know.

"Oh yes, he liked me a lot. He used to give me a hundred in every examination. We had some very interesting talks together and he

always discussed politics with great enjoyment.”

“If that’s the case,” Mao suggested, “you must go and see him.”

I laughed at the suggestion. “Don’t forget,” I said, “in this community government officers and beggars are the two extremes. They represent the highest and lowest in society. No one looks down on beggars so much as government officers. We came from Changsha as beggars and we have had some very interesting experiences. But we have never called on a government officer. I think you are right. What do you say to our taking this opportunity to make a new experiment?”

“After all, he does know you, and he won’t treat us as beggars,” said Mao confidently.

“The biggest problem,” I pointed out, “will be to get past the doorkeepers and the other servants of the yamen. Mr. Chang Kang-feng himself will not treat us as beggars, but his attendants will. Our problem is to get past the attendants. Come on, let’s go and try. We’ll see what happens.”

Mao was enthusiastic. “Good!” he exclaimed. “This is another unique episode in our adventure: ‘The Beggars Visit the Mandarin!’ I suppose we will go just as we are? Straw shoes and all?”

“Of course. We’re going to visit District Magistrate Chang as beggars!” I exclaimed.

The District Magistrate, who held one of the most important government executive posts in the district and who wielded the most power, was highly respected by the people. His position was far more important than that of mayors in other countries and his yamen, or official residence, was palatial and imposing—very different from local government offices in most western countries.

Mao Tse-tung and I had to ask the way several times, but eventually we arrived at the magnificent yamen. In front was a broad square, the center of which was exactly opposite the middle gate in the outer wall and one could look through to two similar gates beyond. These gave access to the large public hall where justice was administered. The private rooms of the Magistrate would be beyond this. Inside the big main gate and to the right stood the doorkeeper. He was also a very important person because it was his function to act as a screen, allowing only those who had legitimate business with the Magistrate to pass through.

We walked across the wide square and up to the big gate, where we were immediately halted by the guards who barred our passage. We insisted upon entering and, finally, after a brief hesitation, he let us pass on to the gatekeeper's office so that we could argue with him. The guards gave us the impression of being too lazy to take any responsibility upon themselves and they thus seemed to be more in the nature of a neutral element.

The doorkeeper, a very tall and coarse individual, came striding out, shouting as he came, "Get out! Get out of here quickly! What are beggars doing in the yamen?" He paused to stare at our shorts, straw shoes, umbrellas, and bundles, and then he started off again, even louder than before, "Get out, I tell you! What have you come in here for?"

"We've come to visit the District Magistrate," I said, taking one of my visiting cards from my pocket and writing Mao's name on it. "Will you please announce us?" I handed him the card quietly.

He stood there stupefied! "Beggars with visiting cards! What's the name? Siao Shu-tung and Mao Tse-tung! Why do you give me this card?" he asked.

"Please give it to the District Magistrate and tell him we would like to see him," I replied.

"Why do you come to see him? Do you want to accuse someone? Don't you know that you have to send in a petition first?"

"But we have not come here to accuse anyone," I said. "We were passing through the city and we want to pay him a visit."

The poor man stood and stared at us as if he could not believe his own ears. One could imagine that he suspected we were a pair of lunatics. In a puzzled voice he asked, "What business can beggars have with the District Magistrate?"

"Your District Magistrate is an excellent official and a very kind man. I am quite sure he will be willing to talk to a couple of beggars. Please go and see. Just take the visiting card to him and ask him!"

The doorkeeper shouted, "You're mad! If I go and tell the Magistrate that a couple of beggars want to see him, he'll think I've lost my reason and he would probably fire me on the spot! You get out of here! And don't bother me again! If you don't want to go of your own free will, we'll have the guards kick you out. Come on, get going!"

"No," I remonstrated. "We must see the District Magistrate."

Mao added, "We are beggars, yes, but we must see the Magistrate!"

The doorkeeper lost his patience and shouted, "Well, if you won't be reasonable, I'll have to have you removed by force! Guards! Guards! Guards! Come quickly!"

It looked as if the doorkeeper really meant business. The two soldiers who stood guard at the gate came walking over.

"Who dares to use force on a guest of the Magistrate?" I asked. "Aren't you afraid of being dismissed from your post?"

"We only want to see the District Magistrate," added Mao. "We have done nothing against the law. Let's see who dares to compel us to leave!"

Sitting down on one of the stone benches inside the gate, I said, "We two beggars are not going to leave the yamen till we have seen the District Magistrate." Mao took a place by my side.

Now three men had come out of the gatekeeper's office and another soldier had joined the group. Some of these individuals were very coarse featured, but others looked at us more kindly. They all stood in a semicircle staring at us and telling us we had to go, but not one attempted to lay hands on us.

Presently an older man in the group spoke to the gatekeeper, "Why don't you go and tell the Magistrate that there are a couple of fools here who say they want to see him, and that they are annoying us because they refuse to leave?"

"How can I do that?" asked the doorkeeper. "Only last week a poor relative came to beg money. I went in to announce him without suspecting. After he had gone, the Magistrate scolded me because after I'd announced him, he couldn't refuse to see him and he had to give him money. He said then that my very first duty was to distinguish among the visitors and to announce only those whom I thought he ought to see. If I thought they were undesirable, I was to turn them away without bothering him. How can I announce a couple of beggars after that? Even if they are mad, I'm not!"

The old man agreed that he was right and said, "Let me try. I'll go in and tell him they are bothering me and that we tried to get them to leave, but they refuse to go. I'll ask him what we are to do. I won't show him the visiting card, unless he asks for it. That way he

can decide what should be done, and we are not responsible."

The old man went inside, put on a long gown, and combed his hair. Then he took my card, put it in his pocket, and walked slowly toward the inner gate. The younger gatekeeper with the coarse manners shouted after him loudly, "You get an order from the Magistrate to have these two fools tied up and sent to prison for a couple of days. That will teach them not to go around bothering honest citizens!"

We knew this admonition was meant for us and not for the old man, so we pretended not to hear. We just sat there quietly; but we could not help smiling to ourselves.

The old gatekeeper was not away very long. Suddenly he appeared through the second gate, walking much faster than on his outward journey. He was smiling to himself. He walked straight to the younger man and said, "The Magistrate says to take these two gentlemen to his private study as quickly as possible!"

We still sat quietly on our bench, pretending not to hear, but we were amused to see the astonished expressions on the faces of the soldiers and the others as they looked at one another when they received this unexpected order. The coarse-looking gatekeeper asked the older man very earnestly in a low voice if he was quite sure he had understood the Magistrate correctly. Did he really say to take them to his private study?

"Oh, yes," the old man replied. "I heard him clearly and correctly. He told me twice that they were to be shown immediately to his private study!"

After this brief aside, he came over to us, bowed low and said politely, "The Magistrate will receive you immediately. Will you please follow me?"

When we picked up our bundles and umbrellas, the old man wanted to carry them for us, but we said, "No, thank you. Beggars carry their own bundles, you know." We followed him through the second and third gates, then through a garden and to the Magistrate's private rooms. Mr. Chang Kang-feng was in his study waiting for us.

When the gatekeeper had departed, he asked in a surprised voice, "Mr. Siao, what has happened? Where have you come from? You look as if you have had trouble!"

"We have come from Changsha," I replied. "This is Mr. Mao

Tse-tung, my First Normal schoolmate of Class Fourteen."

Mr. Chang shook hands with Mao and asked, "Have you both come from Changsha directly to Yiyang?"

"We started from Changsha and passed through Ningsiang and Anhwa Districts on foot," I replied.

"And how is it that you came to see me here in Yiyang?" he asked.

"It was just by chance," I explained. "When we entered the city, we saw the proclamations pasted up on the walls and when we realized that you were the District Magistrate, we decided to pay you a visit. From here we plan to go on to Yuankiang."

"I see," Mr. Chang said. "And where will you go from Yuankiang?"

"We'll just follow the main road and let it lead us wherever it will," I replied enigmatically.

"But where is it you really want to go? What are you trying to do?" he asked, puzzled by my reply.

I knew that Mr. Chang was at a complete loss to understand this strange situation; so I explained in detail our idea of the "beggar holiday" and told him of some of our experiences on the road. He was clearly astonished, but he said he admired our courage in trying such an experiment. "Most people would not be able to understand," he commented. "That's why the gatekeeper came in a while ago to tell me that there were a couple of fool beggars who insisted on seeing me and that they would not be sent away! When I asked who they were, he gave me your visiting card and I realized it was you. But, to tell the truth, I can fully appreciate the man's attitude when I look at your dress and at your straw shoes! Now you go and have a good wash and then we can have a good long chat."

We talked with Mr. Chang for several hours and had supper with him. At the table he told us that one of our former schoolmates was now chairman of the local board of education; another was director of the high school; and another director of the primary school. Altogether six graduates from my former college now held important positions in the local educational circles. He wanted to send them messages to come to the yamen the following morning to have a welcome party for us.

We protested that we did not really want such a welcome party, but Mr. Chang insisted. "How can I keep your visit a secret?" he

asked. "They will all be delighted to see you!" Finally we consented, but we went to visit each one of them first.

Thus the two beggars were again transformed into honorable guests. We remained in Yiyang for three days before continuing our journey to Yuankiang. When we left, Mr. Chang insisted upon our accepting four dollars for emergency expenses and he ordered the gatekeeper to accompany us as far as the city wall. We assured him that we did not need the company, but Mr. Chang would not hear of our going alone.

When we were out on the road, I said to the gatekeeper, "Your master is a very good man! He would not hear of beggars being tied up and sent to prison. Instead he has entertained us charmingly!" The gatekeeper lowered his head, but spoke not a word.

## 32

### The Yuankiang Flood

The gatekeeper from Mr. Chang's yamen left us near the Yuankiang signpost just outside the city gate, indicating that the main road led to the district city of Yuankiang. The District of Yuankiang is one of the largest in Hunan. Once we were alone, we began to discuss this latest experience.

Mao criticized our host, Mr. Chang, "Although that doorkeeper was hateful and intolerant, his master, Mr. Chang was really worse. After all, the doorkeeper was only obeying the orders and Mr. Chang had positively given him instructions not to let poor people come in! Mr. Chang is what you call a *shih li hsiao jen*, a person whose chief aim in life is the obtaining of personal influence and money, and whose mind seems to be incapable of rising to higher thoughts. As for the gatekeeper, I've seen many better types! They're not all like that!"

"No, and not all the district magistrates are like that either," I replied. "There's an old saying, 'The doors of the yamen are wide open like a figure *pa* (eight); but however good your case, it is useless to go in for justice if you have no money! Money is Justice!'"

"Yes," agreed Mao. "There are very few people in the community who do not share that attitude. Money is one of the most powerful